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Recount results in: Derek Mallow wins Georgia House race by 19 votes

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A hand recount showed Derek Mallow defeated Anne Allen Westbrook by 19 votes in the Georgia House District 163 Democratic primary runoff, according to Elections Supervisor Russell Bridges.

The Board of Elections completed the recount late Wednesday afternoon. Westbrook has since conceded the race and congratulated him on his victory.

The board is expected to certify the hand recount results Friday following a meeting with Mallow and Westbrook to thoroughly review the election's outcome.

"I want to work hard for everyone in this district to ensure everyone has a voice and no one is left out," Mallow said in a text message Thursday. "I will do my best to be a servant leader, and I hope our community wil help me do that."

Teams of vote counters, which included representatives appointed by both candidates, conducted the hand recount of 5,338 ballots over a five-day period. The process revealed the certified results from the Aug. 11 runoff was off by a single vote -- one ballot cast for Mallow had been counted twice.

According to the recount, Mallow won 2,678 to 2,659.

The hand recount is the first conducted since Georgia overhauled its voting system earlier this year. The new equipment involves a touch-screen ballot marking device where users record their votes, which are then printed out on a paper ballot that includes a QR code. The printed record is then scanned into a computer via an optical scanner, which reads the QR code.

The hand recount verified that the vote info in the QR code reflects the choices the voters made on the ballot marking device, said Bridges, the elections supervisor.

"The hand recount did support the machines' accuracy," he said.

Westbrook concurred on that point but expressed concerns about other parts of the process.

"I asked for the recount to get transparency into our voting processes," Westbrook wrote in a text message Thursday. "After spending more than a week recounting ballots, I have more confidence in some of the processes, like absentee balloting, but I have more questions than ever about Board of Elections processes for ensuring every ballot is accounted for and every vote is counted, due to errors during both the primary and the recount."

Westbrook is making reference to odd swings in the reported number of ballots cast in the race in the days following the election and to a delay in the recount due to officials missing approximately 1,000 uncounted ballots.

Mallow characterized the recount as a valuable learning experience about the voting process.

"We have a new understanding of the voting process," Mallow said. "We look forward to trying to make sure every vote is counted in the November election by educating the pubic to ensure they check and recheck their absentee ballot or or their printed ballot before they leave the polling place or before they place it in the mail."

The recount outcome means Mallow will represent the district in the Georgia House starting in January. He will run unopposed in the Nov. 3 general election. The longtime incumbent, J. Craig Gordon, chose not to run for re-election.

The Board of Elections held the hand recount at their Eisenhower Drive office with observers from both candidates, the political parties and the Secretary of State's office filling the small office.

The recount got underway sometime after noon on Sept. 2, with about two hours needed to setup the volunteers and explain the process.

Bridges reminded everyone the hand recount was a first for the state and all were working to do their best in these uncharted waters.

Westbrook had a number of questions about the accuracy of the count, leading her to file a petition in Chatham County Superior Court asking for a recount by hand. The petition was filed by Westbrook and her campaign.

Georgia law grants a candidate the right to a recount if the certified margin is less than one half of one percent.